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ABSTRACT

Successful makers of "persuasive films"--i.e., films which attempt to incorporate the viewers' attitudes in the message in order to influence them--were surveyed for this study to determine the procedures used in the planning and production of educational films. This survey replicated a 1981 study by Simonson, but included several follow up measures in an effort to avoid the low return rate of the original study. This study achieved a 44% return rate, compared to Simonson's 34%. The survey showed a consensus for the following techniques and strategies for producing persuasive films: making the film "fun" to watch; assessing the target audience; using actors who are similar to the target audience; using written teacher's guides and follow up discussions; and using realism that is relevant to the viewer. Comments from the film-makers provided some information about the low rate of return, as responses indicated an unwillingness to agree on a set of guidelines, given the complicated nature of the subject, and also a reluctance to reveal successful techniques because of the highly competitive nature of film-making. It is suggested that these comments indicate a need for further research on the art of persuasive film-making. (28 references) (EW)

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FILM-MAKERS AND PERSUASIVE FILMS: A Study to Determine How Persuasive Films are Produced

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FILM-MAKERS AND PERSUASIVE FILMS: A Study to Determine How Persuasive Films are Produced

"...it can be argued that a majority of our educators have more in common with persuaders than they realize. The truly educational film must not only answer questions but question answers." (Rose, 1962)

Attitude formation and change are important educational goals. Educators are faced with the need to urge learners to accept certain points of view, and to promote certain attitudinal positions. If a fundamental goal of education is to question what is generally accepted, then the function of the persuader in society might be to urge acceptance of that which has been questioned. Whether it is realized or not, educators are constantly advocating one position in preference of another (Rose, 1962).

The field of education deals directly with persuasive messages. The educator's method, in theory, is to give an unbiased presentation of the relevant facts known about a process or a situation and then to let the learner judge. The acceptance or rejection of an idea is theoretically based on the learner's prior knowledge and the ability to evaluate evidence.

Since World War II, when films were used to teach millions of G.I.'s topics such as the basics of hygiene, operation of the M-1 rifle, or the procedures for bracketing with mortar fire, the training film has been a popular and useful tool to the educator. The purpose of a film is based on one of the following: enlightenment, entertainment, or persuasion (Rose, 1963). Educational films must catch the interest, arouse feelings, and involve the student emotionally in some way if the film's idea is to become an intimate functional part of the student's perception and thinking. An educational film will teach very little if the student is merely a passive onlooker (Ashiem, 1955).

The persuasive film is different from other categories of motion pictures because it is designed with attitude formation and change as its primary purpose. They attempt to involve the viewers' attitudes into a message in order to influence them. While most films are designed with some persuasive elements, a persuasive film is defined as one where attitude change is the single most important goal of the motion picture, and where entertainment or enlightenment are included only to contribute to the ultimate goal of persuasion (Simonson, 1981).

The importance of attitude research is often based on the relationship between attitudes and achievement. It has been difficult for educational researchers to identify a direct correlation between the two because of the many external influences on both. However,

there have been a number of researchers who have identified a positive link between "liking and learning" (Fenneman, 1973; Greenwald, 1965, 1966; Levy, 1973; Simonson, 1977; and Simonson & Bullard, 1978, for example).

How attitude affects learning is only one reason to measure attitudes. There are other reasons why it is important to know how to persuade. There are times when it is important to promote a certain attitudinal position and encourage students to accept the "truth" of certain ideas. Also, educators need to have an idea of the techniques that affect attitudes of learners in order to avoid influencing them at undesirable times (Fleming & Levie, 1978).

Since Thurstone's landmark study in 1931 that demonstrated films were capable of producing attitude changes in children, many experiments have been conducted to study the relationship between instructional media and attitude formation or change in learners. Numerous studies have shown that films have influenced children. In 1933, Peterson and Thurstone's study demonstrated that films changed children's attitudes, making them consistent with the values presented in the films. Levonian (1960, 1962, 1963) reported that a persuasive film on India produced a significant positive attitude change in viewers. Still more studies that found films could produce attitude change were reported by Allison (1966, on science), Greenhill (1957), Alese (1973) and Reid (1970).

In 1979, Simonson published a list of six guidelines that, if included in the planning, production, or use of mediated instruction, would contribute to the development of desired attitudinal outcomes. These guidelines were based on results gathered from over one hundred research studies on attitudes and media. Establishing the guidelines was one of the first steps toward the development of exact processes needed for producing mediated messages with persuasion in mind.

Simonson's guidelines were used to propose techniques that could be used in mediated messages. Previously, there was little definitive information available in the literature concerning the specific procedures used in persuasive instruction, especially for persuasive films. It can be said that educational films persuade viewers to agree with certain ideas, however, the techniques used by film-makers in the production of persuasive motion pictures that affect attitudes have not been systematically identified, examined, and categorized. There has not been any comparison between what researchers say are the procedures for persuading and what film-makers do when persuasion is their goal.

In 1981, Simonson reported on a survey of award-winning film-makers who were asked to explain the techniques they used when they planned and produced persuasive instructional films. A number of specific techniques, directly related to Simonson's (1979) six guidelines, were identified. However, a low questionnaire return rate made generalizations about the results inappropriate. The study reported in this paper is a modified replication of Simonson's 1981 study. Most procedures were repeated. However, a rigorous series of

follow-up steps were followed in order to maximize the number of questionnaires returned.

The purpose of this study was to determine what procedures are used by successful film-makers when they plan and produce persuasive educational films.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In order to obtain information from film-makers about persuasive films, a list of professional cinematographers was needed. Since the Council on International Non-Theatrical Events (CINE) lists film-makers who have received awards, a current CINE catalog was used to obtain names of "successful" film-makers. Since the purpose of this study was to ask film-makers who were experienced in persuasive film-making to evaluate techniques, and since the nature of this study was descriptive, a random selection of film-makers was not considered necessary. Only film-makers who had "successfully" produced films are listed as Golden Eagle Award winners in the CINE catalog. Golden Eagle Award winning film producers were the target population for the study.

Approximately two hundred film-makers listed as Golden Eagle award winners were sent a copy of the Film Maker Survey (FMS) with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. These film-makers were chosen because the descriptions of their films in the CINE catalog seemed to indicate that their motion pictures were persuasive in nature.

THE FMS

In Simonson's 1981 study, an analysis of the characteristics of those film-makers who completed the survey as compared to those who did not return it, failed to reveal any significant relationships that might have indicated that a biased subset of film-makers answered the (FMS) as compared to those who did not. However, the return rate of approximately 34% was considered too low to permit generalizations of results. In spite of the low return rate, it was determined that the FMS was an appropriate measure of film-maker opinions. It had produced consistent and usable results in 1981, and its questions could be related directly to the guidelines for producing persuasive instructional messages. The content of the questionnaire remained generally the same, and only revisions in format and structure were made.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part One dealt with the background and experience of the film-maker. Part Two had the film-makers rate, discuss, or evaluate techniques used in persuasive film-making. Each question in Part Two of the questionnaire was related to one of the six guidelines for attitude change identified by Simonson (1981).

Verification and Distribution of the Questionnaire

Revisions on the questionnaire were minor. A cover letter was written to explain the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was designed to be folded, stapled and returned by mail (postage-paid). Four weeks after the first mailing a second mailing was distributed to non-responders. Two weeks after the second follow-up, a reminder postcard was mailed to non-respondents.

Those film-makers who had not responded at the end of a month were randomly sampled. Twenty film-makers were identified as representative of the non-responding group. The sample were interviewed on the telephone and asked to return the questionnaire in the next few days. The results of questionnaires completed by this group of non-responding film-makers were compared to the results of the responding film-makers to determine if the non-responding subjects answered the questions in about the same manner as the responding group. There were no significant relationships that might have indicated that a biased subset of film-makers answered the FMS as compared to those who did not. A total of eighty-seven questionnaires were returned for a return rate of forty-four per cent.

The data collected were used to determine film-maker's perceptions of the techniques used in the planning and production of persuasive films. The ratings of the techniques were tabulated, and where appropriate, rank orders were established. First, all descriptive statistics were obtained for each question. This included average scores, standard deviations of scores, and the number responding to each question. Next, correlations between all relevant variables were computed. Last, more in-depth analyses of data determined to be interesting based on the descriptive statistics were conducted.

RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

Ninety-five percent of the responding film-makers indicated that film-making was their primary occupation. Approximately sixty-eight (67.8%) percent of the film-makers classified themselves as producer/director, 19% were producers, 2% were directors, and ten percent responded to the "Other" category. The majority of the respondents who chose the "other" category were classified as writers.

The average length of time a respondent had been in the film-making profession was about 18 years. The range was from three to fifty years. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents were males. The average age of all respondents was forty-five. The range from youngest to oldest was twenty-eight to seventy-four years.

Fifty-four percent of the film-makers indicated they had some type of formal training in film-making, and a little over forty-three percent had only on-the-job training. Almost fourteen percent of the sample had less than one year of formal training. Approximately twenty percent had between one and two years of formal training; two

percent indicated between two and three years of training, ten percent responded that they had a bachelor's degree, and eleven percent had master's degrees, or more, in film-making. Only seventeen percent reported having had some sort of training in the techniques and theories of persuasion.

The average number of films of all types produced by each film-maker was approximately 102. The number of films produced ranged from one to one thousand. The average number of persuasive films produced by the average film-maker was 67.

The average number of Golden Eagle Awards (the highest award given by CINE) for films of all types received by responding film-makers was 6. The average number of Golden Eagle Awards received for persuasive films was 5. Film-makers reported that the average length of their persuasive films was 24 minutes. Films ranged in length from ten minutes to sixty minutes.

The definition of persuasive film used in this study was considered appropriate by eighty-five percent of the film-makers. Film-makers were nearly equally divided when asked their feelings concerning the market for persuasive films. Twenty-four percent of the film-makers surveyed felt that fifty-one to seventy-five percent of the film market was for persuasive films rather than informative films.

Persuasive Film Production Techniques

One of the major goals of this study was to determine how film-makers would go about producing a film when persuasion was their goal. Film-makers responding to the FMS indicated that they felt a formal prescript writing target audience assessment was important in the production of persuasive films ($X = 4.4$; 5 = very important, 1 = very unimportant). Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated they felt persuasive films were planned and produced differently than other educational films and the degree of difference ranged between very different to somewhat different ($X = 1.80$; 1 = very different, 5 = almost the same).

In order to determine which production techniques were considered most effective for persuasive films, film-makers were asked their opinion on the importance of a number of techniques. The same techniques were rated in several, different questions by respondents in order to validate ratings and to determine what production techniques were considered most effective for persuasive films. An analysis of these ratings follows.

WHEN COMPARING PERSUASIVE FILM-MAKING TO OTHER FILM-MAKING, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO .....

very important

1. use motion in the filmed action
2. present new information

3. use believable or realistic scenes
4. use an arousing or dramatic musical score
5. use color
6. produce a shorter film rather than longer film
7. use many cuts/scenes rather than few
8. use physically attractive actors/actresses

very unimportant

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING IN INFLUENCING ATTITUDES OF VIEWERS IN PERSUASIVE FILMS?

most effective

1. conduct a target audience pre-planning assessment
2. Have actors/people in the film similar to the target audience
3. present inspirational messages
4. include a teacher's guide with follow-up questions
5. Use testimonials
6. use professional actors
7. use a big name star to promote the position
8. use graphs, charts and other visual methods for presenting facts
9. present verbal information visually through title scenes

least effective

RATE THE FOLLOWING TECHNIQUES IN ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE PRODUCTION OF PERSUASIVE FILMS.

effective techniques

1. "Arouse" the audience intellectually, sexually, or emotionally
2. Make the film "fun" to watch
3. present factual information

not effective techniques

4. be as "nonverbal" as possible
5. present both sides of an argument
6. use "talking faces"
7. use "animation"
8. "scare" the audience by presenting the consequences of not following the recommendations of the film
9. use many title scenes

The film-makers generally agreed that conducting a target audience assessment and arousing the audience in some way were the most important persuasive film techniques. In another question, film-makers ranked three statements about strategies in film production in order of importance. Of the three, the arousal of viewers emotions was reported to be most important. Technical quality was listed as next in importance, and the presentation of new information was listed as least important of the three.

Almost forty (39.1%) percent of the film-makers felt it was exciting to produce a persuasive film rather than other kinds of educational films ($\bar{X} = 4.1$; 1 = very unexciting, 5 = very exciting). Half of the film-makers reported that they always believed in the message of the films they produced. Twenty-one percent thought the message was usually correct and twenty-one percent reported some messages affect them and some did not; one indicated he never became involved with the content of his films.

The sample felt that their persuasive films were relatively effective at changing attitudes of viewers ($\bar{X} = 3.83$; 5 = very effective, 3 = somewhat effective, 1 = very ineffective). Over half (67.8%) of the responding film-makers indicated there was a need for more information concerning techniques in persuasive film production.

Film-makers were asked if they ever evaluated the impact of their films. Seventy-eight percent of those responding said they had evaluated the effectiveness of the persuasive films they produced. The following methods for determining effectiveness were given:

Response	# of film-makers who used technique (n = 68)
1. comments from viewers	56
2. results from contests	45
3. informal surveys	41
4. sales	37

5.	comments of other film-makers	29
6.	intuition	25
7.	formal experimentation	15
8.	other	11

Summary of Results

Those film-makers who responded to the survey produced a consensus on several techniques and strategies that they felt were important in the production of a persuasive film. Arousing the viewer either emotionally or intellectually and basing the film on an audience pre-assessment were considered important by the majority of the responding film-makers. Other techniques that were listed as somewhat important were:

making the film "fun" to watch

assessing the target audience

using actors that were similar to the target audience

using written teacher's guides and follow-up discussions

using realism that was relevant to the viewer

Techniques that were generally not considered effective or important in persuasive films were:

using title scenes

using animation

"scaring" the audience

using talking faces

using charts and graphs to present facts

using attractive actors

using many cuts/scenes

It is interesting to note that 67.8% of the respondents felt there was a need for more information about the production of persuasive films. This survey identified some of the techniques film-makers used when producing motion pictures, and several techniques that they felt were effective for changing attitudes of viewers.

Film-makers were also asked to list the title of a persuasive film they felt was exemplary. The sixty-nine film-makers that

responded to this question each listed one film. Of the sixty-nine films listed, only five films were listed more than once. Each of the five films were only listed twice. Those films that were listed twice were:

Harlan County	Triumph of the Will
War Games	Dark Circles
China Syndrome	

It was interesting to note that two of the five films that were listed more than once were full length features that were box office successes.

Since Simonson's 1981 study had a low return rate (34%), one of this study's objectives was to obtain a higher rate of return. The fact that only forty-four percent of the sample returned the survey was a concern. The unique personality of film-makers, the mobility of members of the film-making profession, and the large number of address changes contributed to the rather low rate of return.

Comments from film-makers on the surveys that were returned added information about the low rate of return. Responses seemed to indicate an unwillingness to agree that a set of guidelines could be developed for persuasive film-making. The overall feeling of the several film-makers who wrote comments was that this survey only "touched the surface" of a complicated subject. Also, film-makers seemed to be reluctant to reveal techniques or procedures that have been successful for them because of the highly competitive nature of film-making. Success is often achieved in motion picture production because of the use of a unique or creative new technique. By sharing their discoveries other film-makers might become equally successful therefore reducing any advantage a film-maker might have. Some of these "artists" might have felt that a knowledge of what makes them "tick" would somehow destroy their magic powers of creativity (Rose, 1963).

The results and conclusions of this study are not a recipe for the development of persuasive messages, but are a guide for further research. As one film-maker said, "It is often misleading or risky to accept generalities drawn from surveys and turn the findings into absolute rules that govern the making of a single film." Other comments described film-making as "an extremely subjective medium," and "a very complex and interesting subject." These comments from the responding film-makers may be evidence of the need for a more scientific approach to the investigation of the art of persuasive film-making.

"For it is only when the doer matures enough to want to understand why he does what he does, more than just intuitively or impulsively, can he consciously and systematically hope to raise the standard of his art to new heights. Until such answers become clear the film maker can only play a game of trial and error. Once

understanding enters the process the way is paved for a marriage between the science and the art of cinema" (Rose, 1963).

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